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STANFIELD HALL.

BY J. F. SMITH,

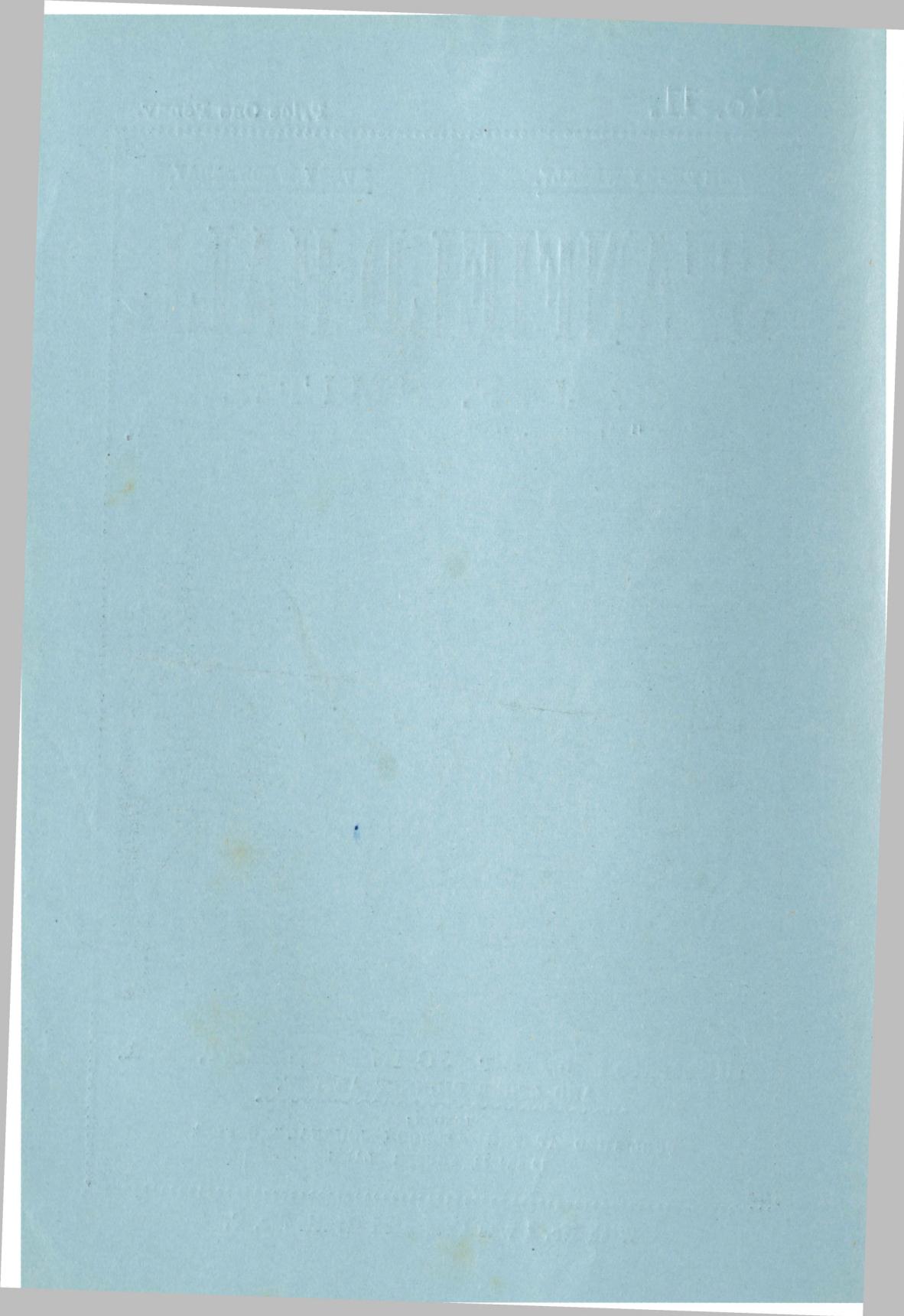
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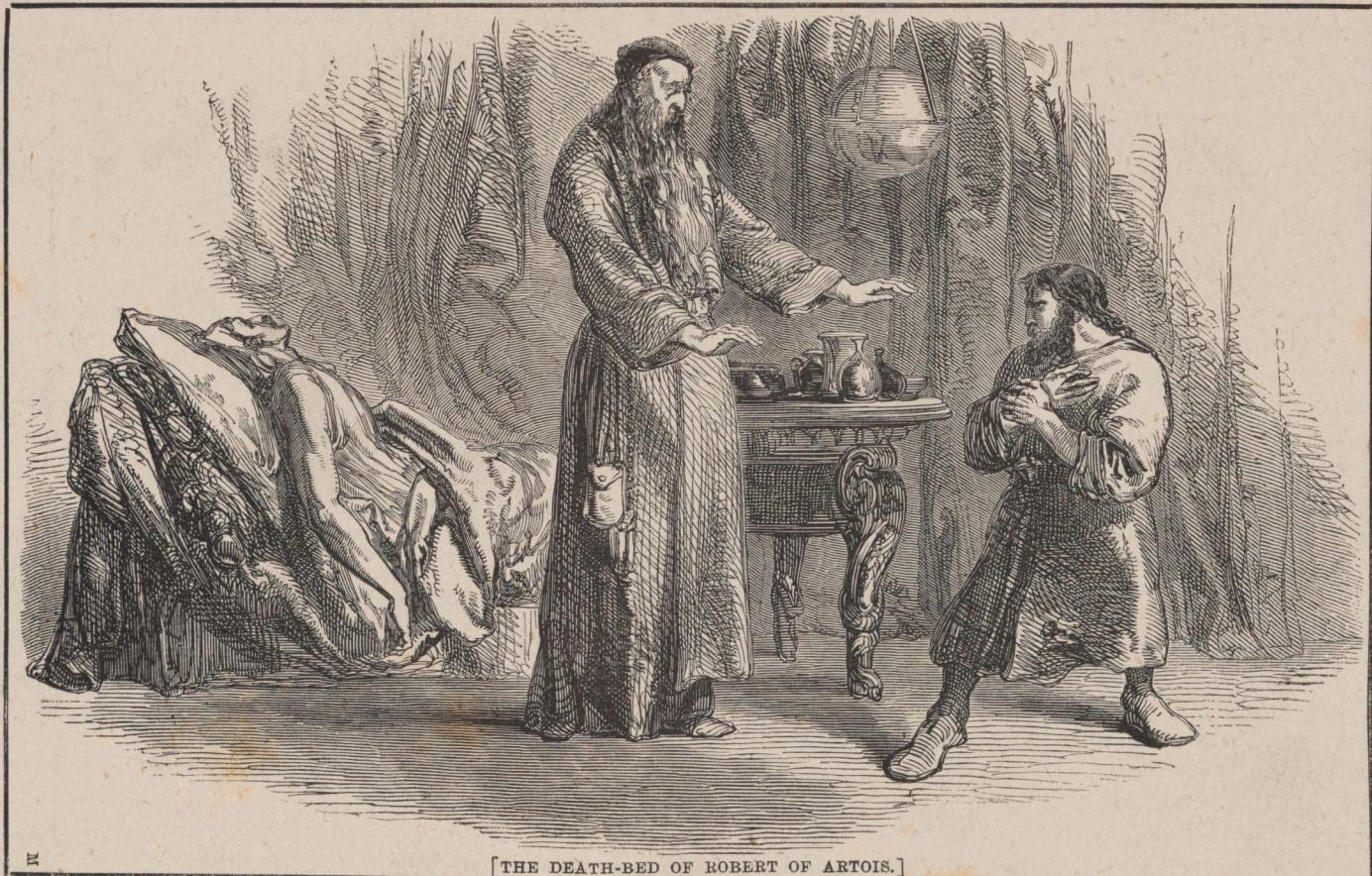


Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.
AND OTHER EMINENT ARTISTS.

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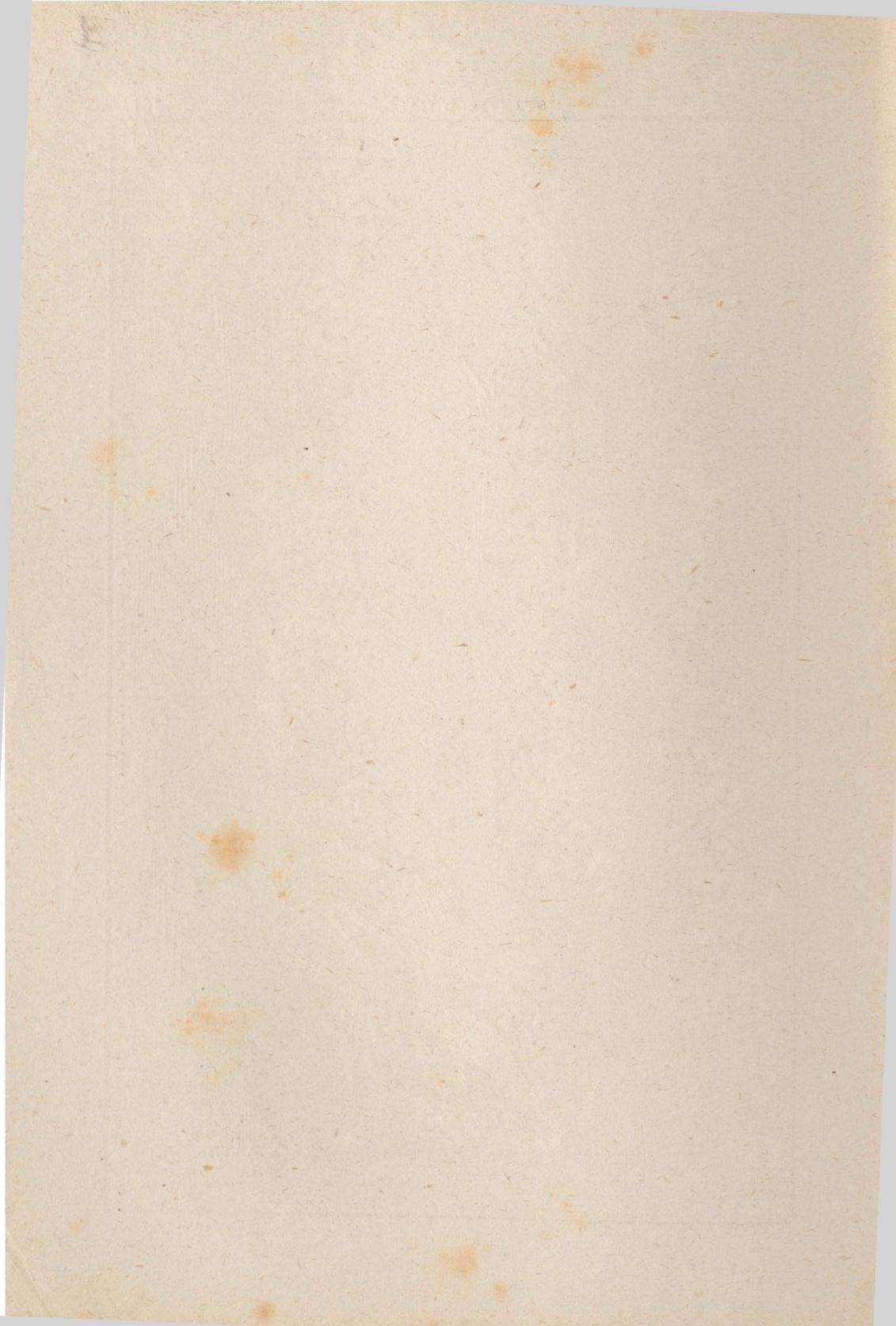
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[THE DEATH-BED OF ROBERT OF ARTOIS.]

STANFIELD HALL.



deserted armoury, nor paused till she reached the door of the apartment where Matilda and her cousin were confined ; a sentry had been placed there, who raised his partisan at her approach : his orders were that none should enter. Fortunately for Rachel's enterprise, she still retained the signet-ring of her betrayer, given to her charge in an hour of confidence, which her self-sacrifice had but too well merited. Extending her hand, she showed the glittering gem, exclaiming as she did so—

“ This signal all within the walls obey. I am charged by thy master to hold converse with his prisoners. Give me way.”

The man, not doubting the truth of her assertion, unhesitatingly lowered his weapon, and gave her ingress to the chamber, where we must leave her for awhile, and return to the operations of the besiegers.

The flames had destroyed the buildings which connected the keep of Filby Castle with the lofty tower which served as principal entrance to the edifice. The two latter, however, still held good ; the threat of Robert of Normandy binding the garrison and their chief by a sense of mutual safety. The principal efforts of the enemy were, however, directed against the keep, where they knew the captives were confined, and to which Robert of Artois and the greater number of his followers had retired. Herbert de Lozenga's men had brought several battering-rams with them, which, under the direction of George of Erpingham, they were suspending from their massive swings before the iron-plated gates of the stronghold. It was an object with the besieged to impede the progress of their labours, and it was the spot where the contest raged most fiercely. The northern side of the donjon, next the water, was unassailed, and comparatively unguarded.

It was from an angle of this position that Harro had winged the shaft at the request of Rachel.

“ Listen ! ” cried the prelate, as he perused the billet. “ We have friends within the walls. Heaven will bless our cause ! Perhaps ere morning's dawn the lost brides may be restored to us.”

“ Read, father, read ! ” impatiently exclaimed both Ulrick and Mirvan.

The bishop did so :—“ When the first hour of twilight falls, the little postern 'neath the northern bastion will be opened. Place your men in ambush. An esquire and a female will issue from the keep. As you would avoid the sin of deep ingratitude, harm not a hair of that man's head. His companion will explain the means by which the keep may be secured. Keep up the assault upon the western side, draw the attention of the besieged to that spot ; and that alone. Once within the walls, courage and your own good swords must do the rest.”

“ Perhaps some snare,” said Odo of Caen ; “ can you guess the writing ? ”

"Evidently a woman's hand," replied the reader, handing it at the same time to the two bereaved lovers.

Ulrick and Mirvan each in turn eagerly took the scroll, and returned it to the prelate with a feeling of disappointment, for it was not the handwriting of either Isabel or Matilda.

"Be it from friend or foe its counsel shall be tried," exclaimed Ulrick; "I will not lose one chance of vengeance."

"Right, boy!" cried his grandfather, the venerable Edda, who, despite his years, had been one of the foremost in the attack. "See! George of Erpingham waves his sword in signal that the battering-rams are placed. Odo and I will conduct the assault, whilst you and your all but brother lead a party of your men by the wood, to avoid suspicion. Once within its friendly shade, let them steal one by one to the northern postern. If, as the writer promises, the door should open—"

"Leave us to answer for the rest," interrupted the two young men, as they hastened to follow his advice, and draw off their men; "perhaps, when next we meet, we meet as victors. Farewell."

Ere the aged Saxon could reply, they were on their way.

"Allow me to join you," said Robert of Normandy, as Odo and the veteran marched to the scene of action. "My honour is engaged in this as deeply, knights, as yours. 'Tis long since I have joined in the noble game of war. My blood is warmed, and I feel eager for the sport."

The besieged, who well knew that the destruction of the portal must entail the surrender of the keep, used every means to defeat the efforts of their enemy. Huge benches were brought from the banquet hall, and hurled upon them, crushing numbers beneath their massive weight. Robert of Artois, with the courage which despair will often give, displayed a perseverance worthy of a better cause; armed with a large iron bar, he laboured to loosen one of the enormous stones which formed the battlements of his stronghold, the fall of any one of which must have been fatal to his enemies, and rendered their battering rams useless. He would doubtless have proved successful had his men seconded his efforts with equal ardour to his own; but the slings of the Saxons, who were posted at a distance, so annoyed them that they shrank behind the buttresses, and their leader only owed his safety to the strength of his armour, which was, however, bruised by the heavy blows it had received. As the battering of the huge beams fell upon the portal, he redoubled his frantic efforts, till the vast mass of stone trembled beneath his repeated shocks. So desperate did the besieged at last become, that they used the bodies of the dead and dying of their own party as missiles, and hurled them on the persevering foe.

The attention of all within the walls was directed to the western side so entirely that, as Edda had suggested, the body of men under

the conduct of his grandson and Mirvan reached the postern by the lake, as their unknown correspondent had directed. The last rays of the setting sun had already kissed the bosom of the lake in token of adieu as they arrived there. With breathless impatience they waited for the promised opening of the gate; every moment seemed an age of suspense—an agony of expectation—whose endurance was torture to the mind. The massive doors at last turned slowly upon their rusty hinges, and the esquire Aymer appeared, leading a female closely veiled; in an instant he was secured and disarmed, and the postern closely guarded.

“What treachery is this?” cried Aymer, in astonishment at the unexpected attack; “am I betrayed?”

The youth was destined to a still greater surprise; for his supposed mistress, who was clad in the garments of Rachel, threw herself into the equally astonished Mirvan’s arms; and raising her veil as she did so, discovered the features of Isabel of Bayeux, whom the Jewess, in atonement for her former attempt upon her life, had thus contrived to save.

“Where,” demanded Ulrick, “is Matilda?”

“Still in the tyrant’s power,” sobbed the excited girl; “haste, if ye are men, to save her.”

The words had scarcely passed her lips than Ulrick disappeared, followed by his men; he needed no clue—instinct seemed to guide his steps to the rescue of his betrothed. And Mirvan, after consigning his rescued cousin and her companion to a party of his archers to conduct them from the scene of danger, followed his example; for his heart was too generous to taste of happiness while his sister’s safety or his friend’s peace of mind was still in peril.

The shrieks of despair and the groans of the dying within the walls soon told to Robert of Artois that his den was in the hunter’s power. Casting aside the bar which he had continued to wield, he rushed to the apartment where he had confined his captives, and seizing on a female whom, from her dress, he recognised as Isabel of Bayeux, he dragged her with him to an isolated turret which rose by the side of the keep, the only communication between them being a wooden platform, which, with a few blows of his sword, was easily destroyed.

In a few moments Mirvan and Ulrick were masters of the keep, the enemy being entirely subdued.

“Yield thee, traitor!” cried the latter, gazing with agony on the veiled woman whom Robert of Artois still held firmly by the hand, and whom he believed to be Matilda; “yield, and I spare thy life. But as thou art a man, harm not that trembling dove beside thee.”

“Hear me, vile Saxon,” replied the baffled villain. “I have sworn that Isabel of Bayeux shall be mine; and here, amid the ruins of my house, the destruction of my friends, I keep my oath, and triumph still.”

"And I," exclaimed the Jewess, dashing aside her veil, and gazing sternly upon the destroyer of her peace, "keep mine. In life or death I swore to be beside thee. Where is now the blooming bride thou didst prefer to Rachel's fervent love?—safe in her kindred's arms. Where is now thy hold of tyranny and blood?—the despised Rachel gave it to the triumphant foe. In death—in death we are united! This is a fitting scene for nuptials such as ours. Receive my bridal kiss."

Before the astonished Norman could recover from his disappointment and surprise, Rachel drew the knife which Harro had lent her on the bastion, and plunged it into her seducer's throat. Although her heart beat wildly as she did so, her hand was firm.

"My oath, my oath is kept!" shrieked the wretched woman, as she beheld her victim fall. "God of my fathers, have pity on Thy guilty child!"

Still holding the weapon with which she had struck the blow firmly in her hand, she sprang from the lofty battlements; one shriek, like some despairing angel's cry, and all was still.

"Such is the end of crime," exclaimed Herbert de Lozenga, who, with Edda and Odo of Caen had found the person of Matilda, and conducted her to her betrothed; "let Filby Hold be levelled with the dust, that men may shun its wretched master's crimes."

CHAPTER XI.

FILBY HOLD having been completely destroyed, the victorious party returned to Norwich, where, in a few days, by the bishop's advice, the double marriages of Ulrick and Mirvan were celebrated, amidst the rejoicings of the assembled nobles, and the vassals both of Stanfield and the young earl's wide domains. Normans and Saxons equally rejoiced. The double tie, which cemented the union of the two most powerful leaders of the rival races within the Angles, promised to that portion of the distracted kingdom at least a temporary peace. Herbert de Lozenga had urged the immediate completion of the ceremony, despite the recent death of Matilda's father, for the experienced, wary statesman saw the contest likely to ensue on the death of William the Conqueror—an event of which he daily expected to hear; and he determined to place the happiness of his favourite beyond the chance of war, by a tie which, even in that rude age of despotism and cruelty, was too powerful to be broken—the sanction of the Church.

"Bless you, my children!" he exclaimed, as the two noble youths and their trembling brides knelt to receive his benediction; "may your lives flow on pure as the current of your thoughts,

calm as the exercise of your virtues ; may children, who resemble you, spring like fragrant flowers around you, adorn your path of life, and cheer it at its close ; may the future crown you with its hopes, and past sorrows be repaid you in the present."

Tears—but they were now tears of joy—bedewed the cheeks of Edith as her maternal heart echoed the prelate's benediction ; and she breathed a silent prayer that Ulrick's life might prove happier, far happier, than her own. Edda, too, the venerable Edda, beheld, in his grandson's marriage, the promise of his race renewed ; and adding a blessing equally sincere, but equally destined to be vain.

The day was passed in rejoicing, usual at the period ; the poor were plentifully regaled, the vassals contended in trials of manly skill and strength, whilst their lords jested in the lists, where Matilda and Isabel, as Queens of Beauty, sat to reward and encourage by their smiles the victors and the combatants. The day was a glorious one, and the shields of the nobles and knights, which were affixed to lances round the lists, showed their rich blazonry in the rays of the sun. The two bridegrooms had proved successful in almost every encounter, and thrice laid their trophies at the fair umpires' feet. Even Odo of Caen had been unhelmed by Ulrick, and laughingly observed that if marriage gave such strength of arm, he too must become a Benedict. Robert of Normandy, although passionately addicted to the knightly sport, gallantly declined to joust, declaring that the champions of two such dames must be invincible. It was the law of the tournament that any knight who wished to try the prowess of another should challenge him by touching the shield affixed for that purpose beneath his pennon with his lance—its owner, fully armed, generally remaining on horseback by its side, unless when engaged in the *melée*, or in some separate contest. The sports were nearly ended, when an arrow, sent by some unknown hand amongst the crowd, transfixed the shield of Ulrick. The method of conveying a challenge was so unusual, that most men thought it accident, till Edda, as marshal of the lists, drawing it out discovered a label of parchment affixed to it, with these ominous words : "Foiled, but not subdued!" The old man mournfully shook his head as he read the inscription, which he crushed quickly in his hand, to conceal it from his grandson, unwilling that a cloud of doubt should mar the sunshine of his present hour.

"This is no common arrow," said Odo of Caen, regarding it attentively. "Its feather has been plucked from the ill-omened raven's wing ; the spirit of Robert of Artois hovers round us still. I fear more evil yet."

"I fear so too," observed Hella, the bard, who was standing near his patron, and to whose excitable imagination the circumstance seemed fraught with evil fortune. Had he seen the writing, the

impression would have been even more gloomy and profound, for he was one of those who drew omens from birds, and mysteries from everything. "Who saw the traitor's body?" he demanded.

Neither Edda, Odo of Caen, nor any of the nobles who were standing round, remembered to have seen it.

"Perhaps," resumed the speaker, "the wolf's only wounded, not destroyed. Ulrick may live to feel its fangs again."

"Pshaw!" interrupted the bridegroom, who had seen the flight of the arrow, and who arrived on the spot in time enough to hear the last observation; "the Jewess struck home; and there is no blow as sure as that which is nerved by hate. Besides, tower and keep are both levelled with the dust, and our enemy's bones, doubtless, lie crushed beneath them. But be he living or dead, in body or in spirit, with my good sword, and friends like these around me, I can defy him."

Many a friendly glance answered the appeal; and Ulrick, in the sincerity of his own heart, believed them.

At this instant the prince gave the signal to end the jousts by throwing down his truncheon, and the brides were conducted to the castle, amid the shouting of the multitude and the benedictions of the poor, to keep their marriage feasts. This time the gifted Saxon bard poured out no unwelcome song as his harp sent forth its strain in honour of the bridegrooms and their brides:—

Lady, although thy cheek be pale,
Thy grief is but the bride's sweet sorrow;
Fling over her the silver veil,
Her eyes will sparkle bright to-morrow.

The jewels in her bridal wreath,
Like rays of light and dewdrops clashing,
Are rivalled by the gems beneath—
The eyes through beauty's glad tears flashing

Fill to the bride a ruby cup,
And twine it with the choicest flowers;
With wine and nectar fill it up,
As emblem of her future hours.

Hail to the bridegroom and the bride!
Warm hearts are now around them pressing,
Hands that would aid whate'er betide,
And kindred lips pronounce their blessing.

Then, lady, though thy cheek be pale,
Thy tears are but the bride's sweet sorrow;
Fling over her the silver veil,
Her eyes will sparkle bright to-morrow."

The revel was continued to a late hour; and long after the wine-cup had been pledged to the new-made brides, the song and merry laugh echoed through the old walls of Norwich Castle.

* * * * *

In a remote corner of the city, near the old church of St. Julian, stood a lone house, whose neglected and time-stricken exterior would

have conveyed the idea that it was uninhabited, had not the well cultivated garden, which extended from the back even to the cemetery, proved that careful hands attended it. Plants of a foliage and blossom unknown to Europe were to be found within its low-walled inclosure. This garden was an object of considerable interest and curiosity to the thinly-scattered inhabitants who dwelt between it and the water's edge. No human eye had ever seen the mysterious gardener at his work ; still his labours were evident in the well-weeded walks, and careful training of its flowers and fruits. The house, unlike the ordinary buildings of the period, was entirely of stone. The only apertures for the admission of light were at the back, and those so narrow, and guarded by coarse wooden slides, that it more resembled a fortress than an ordinary dwelling. Its doors—for it had but two, one to the back and front—were studded with thick iron nails. Few persons, however, had ever seen them open ; and such casual passengers or watchers who had, shrank with terror from its inmates, for they were of the despised race of Israel—a people looked upon with abhorrence by the lower orders, and cruelly persecuted, on account of their wealth, by the nobles and petty vavasours of the lands on which they dwelt. Sometimes, however, they secured toleration from their skill in medicine ; and many a feudal lord, who would have wrung the last mark from the Hebrew, protected his physician. In their last character even the Church respected them ; and mitred abbots and dignified prelates, when suffering from the surfeit or the spleen, condescended to invoke their aid.

It was to the reputation which the master of the lone house in question had acquired in the capacity of leech that he owed the degree of safety which he enjoyed. Abram, for such was his name, was from the East—the land of gold and gems, of mystery and beauty—alike the cradle of the faith and superstitions of mankind. 'Tis strange when we reflect how little Europe has really given to the world ; it has perfected science more than created it ; it has accepted religion—split and divided it into sects, but founded none. The East seems to have been like the first-born child, endowed with the Creator's peculiar blessing.

On the night of Ulrick's nuptials, a boat, carefully rowed, glided down the river which half-encircles the city, past the Abbey of Carrow, and stopped only when it reached the shore facing the mansion of the Jew. The rowers carefully drew the boat from out the stream, and having formed a sort of litter with their oars, placed something like a human form upon it ; it was difficult to distinguish what, so carefully was it enveloped in the boatmen's cloaks. Gently they raised their burthen on their shoulders, and, preceded by a man in armour, who had conducted the operation, slowly directed their steps toward the house we have described. Whatever might be the purport of their visit, it was evident that they were expected ;

for, on the first signal, the door was opened to them, and closed the instant they had passed the threshold with their burden.

They were received by a tall, aged man, bearing a brazen lamp, whose strange costume and venerable appearance impressed even the leader of the little band with awe and respect. His beard, of silvery whiteness, worn long, after the fashion of the East, flowed loosely over his dark gaberdine, which, although made in the prescribed form, differed in richness of materials from those generally worn by his persecuted race ; a girdle of silver confined it to his waist ; the plates which composed it were graved with Hebrew characters, as was the case of writing materials, and the clasp of a pocket, curiously ornamented with needlework, which, by chains of the same metal, depended from it. The wearer's features were sharp and intellectual ; the forehead was magnificently high ; the eyes, despite his age, quick and penetrating, but characterised by that restlessness of expression which long habits of watchfulness in scenes of continued danger give ; the aquiline nose and peculiar lip marked his descent from the despised nation of the Jews.

"Place your burden there," said the old man, pointing to a low couch, covered with deer-skins and soft matting. "Holy Abraham ! but 'tis a fearful risk to run. The prince and nobles have doomed him to the gibbet, and should it be discovered that I have aided him, little would they reck in their fury of the poor leech's life. 'Tis a fearful risk ; but it must be run—it must be run. Persecuted as we are ourselves, we owe something to humanity."

"And something to thine interest, Jew," replied the squire. "The day will come when he who sheltered Robert of Artois may lift his head with the proudest. My master has friends more powerful than thou wotst of. This unnatural league between the Norman and the Saxon race cannot last long. The Conqueror draws near to his last breath ; his successor will dearly avenge his favourite's wrongs on those who have assailed him ; and my master's blazon will once more shine with the proudest. His future sovereign's favour awaits him, should he live ; if not, it will avenge him."

"I am no stranger to the value of a prince's gratitude," replied Abram, with a quiet smile ; "but say, how didst thou save him from the ruins of his strong castle ? The world reports him dead ; and those who trembled at his name, whilst living, now fearlessly curse his memory."

"I alone," replied the esquire, "was with him in the tower, except the daughter of thy accursed race whose jealous hand struck the fatal wound. I saw him fall, and would have avenged him, had not the traitress done justice on herself by plunging from the dizzy height, ending her vile career by death. I drew him from the battlements to a secret vault beneath, where for days he hath remained concealed alike from friend or foe ; the fools who

levelled both keep and tower in dust little thought that every stone which fell but added to my master's safety, by hiding the entrance to his concealment. Thou knowst the rest."

"A Jewess!" exclaimed the old man, endeavouring to suppress his agitation; "how came one of our nation to raise her rebellious hand against a Christian's life? But thou hast answered me; thou spakest of jealousy—knowest thou the maiden's name?"

"Rachel," replied the Norman; "she was the daughter of the chief Rabbi of Rouen; my lord took her at the sacking of the city, when Duke Robert seized it from the French. For awhile she was all in all, but at last became so jealous, that his love soon tired; too much fondness fatigues us in a woman: it is the chasing of the deer gives pleasure to the hunter; few prize the game which is so easily won."

A half-suppressed groan broke from the bosom of the old man when he heard the name of the unfortunate being who had been alike the victim of her own passions and Robert of Artois' cruelty. With a violent effort of self-control he mastered his emotion, and pointed to the men who had borne the wounded noble to his house, to remove the cloaks in which he had been wrapped. Brantone—for such was the name of the esquire—would have started had he seen the fierce glance of hate which flashed from the eyes of the leech when the pale features of the wounded man first met his view—the basilisk's alone could have been more fearful. Drawing a small silver probe from the case of instruments which he wore suspended by his side, he proceeded to examine the wound, which was situated in the lower part of the throat, just between the juncture of the neck-piece and the coat of mail."

"Has thy master no friends or kinsmen near," demanded the Jew, "in whom he can confide?"

"I know but one," replied Brantone; "the prior of the Dominicans—his uncle by the mother's side; all else have failed him."

"Send for him quickly, then," resumed the old man; "for in twenty-four hours he must answer for his sins. All human aid is vain. The blow hath been too deeply struck for human aid to save him; and I would not, for the world, a Christian noble should expire beneath my roof."

"Dog!" said the soldier, raising his hand to strike him, "were it a palace, he would honour it."

Abram started back, and drew a long, sharp-pointed weapon from his bosom, and calmly awaited the attack of the infuriated esquire, who paused, half-ashamed of his own violence, and half-awed by the calm attitude of the aged man before him, who seemed so bowed by years that he felt he could crush him with a breath.

"Back!" exclaimed the Jew; "for did the blood of thousands circle in thy veins, thy death were instant. Willingly I would not

take thy life ; for the fierce storm which once raged here is now at peace. A blow would thaw the frozen barriers of my blood, and spread, like Etna's lava, desolation around."

"Patience, old man !" cried the superstitious Norman ; "I did not mean to harm thee. Let there be peace between us."

"Fear not," resumed Abram ; "I am cool—quite cool. Reptiles only sting without discernment. Approach, young man," he added, willing to increase the impression he had already made upon the terrors of the strong soldier ; "nay, fear me not. Observe how wisdom may contend with strength—how palsied age may bid defiance to the force of youth. Look on this tiny instrument—observe it well ; 'tis formed of that precious steel which in the East men prize far more than gold. Tempered in fires lit first by nature's hand, then quenched in snows coeval with the world, the slender point inflicts no gaping wound, but a slight puncture merely—a sempstress's needle would give as deep a scratch ; but the point is venomed—anointed with—Enough, this land breeds not the reptile from whose sting 'twas ta'en."

"It might serve thee against one," doggedly answered Brantone, struggling to conceal his terrors, "but would be useless against our numbers, were we inclined to outrage."

"Thou would'st not be that one," said the leech with an accent of cold contempt ; "but I am armed, were it against thousands. Fearing not death, I have surrounded my lone hearth with him. Norman, there's not a step within these walls but hides a grave ; one blow," he added, catching up an ebony staff, and pointing to a globe of coarse glass suspended from the ceiling, "and a storm more fearful than the simoom's breath would shatter these strong-built walls, and tear their inmates limb from quivering limb. Away !" he added ; "thou knowest my power—knowest how little the old leech fears thee. Away, and do my bidding to the prior. Tell him, when four-and-twenty hours shall pass, his nephew's sleep will be eternal. I have stanch'd many a wound—recalled the fleeting life to many a lance-pierced breast ; but here e'en Abram's skill must fail."

Whether the physician spoke from really conscious power, or from his knowledge of the human heart, so prone to superstition, it would perhaps be difficult to decide. Certain it is, that he possessed vast knowledge, with some charlatanism mixed with it. His words, however, produced the desired effect upon his hearers—ruffians who, under ordinary circumstances, would have desired no better sport than to ill-treat and persecute a Jew. Without a single word, they retired from the house, nor breathed freely till they found themselves beneath the shadow of the church, where alone, according to the superstition of the age, no evil power could approach them.

"Praise be to our Lady !" exclaimed one of the men, devoutly

crossing himself, "we are safe from yon den of sin. I would rather have another such a siege at Filby than pass an hour in it. Think you, sir squire, it is a Christian's part to leave our master in his keeping? 'Tis true his body is past caring for, but then his soul?"

"Pooh!" answered Brantone; "his uncle, the worthy prior, will care for that; the old sinner will be too well paid to play him false; the Church would know how to deal with him, should the Jew attempt aught against his salvation."

"Ay, ay," interrupted a third; "leave the Church alone to deal with infidels and sorcerers; a sprinkling of holy water would take the devil from out of the best of them. I saw the Archbishop of Rouen lately burn three of them; they were fine robust fellows when they went into prison, and fought with their guards like troopers, but the Church soon tamed them; they walked on the morning of their execution as meekly to the stake as a lamb does to the slaughter-house, and sang their own funeral service as piously as any monk of them all."

"Our master, I tell you again, is safe," interrupted the esquire, who well knew his companion's tediousness when once mounted upon his favourite hobby—sorcerers and infidels. "'Tis time that we should separate; I must to the holy prior, who will doubtless repay our fidelity to his nephew with something more solid than benedictions, and you to your hiding-place in Filby woods. When all is over we can pass to Normandy, where a good lance never lacks employment, or a good sword need hang rusty in its scabbard." With these words the group separated; the men to regain their boat, and the esquire to the distant monastery of the Dominicans, where dwelt the uncle of the unworthy Robert of Artois.

As the party left the house of the Jew, the old man carefully closed the iron-bound door, and secured it by a massive chain and many a well-forged bolt; then, raising his lamp from the stone floor, where he had placed it, he slowly directed his steps to the chamber where he had left the wounded man. Going to a small cabinet, he carefully drew from it various balsams and dressings, and spread them on the table in the middle of the room. To have gazed upon him, few would have suspected the storm of passions raging in his breast, his manner was so calm, his actions so deliberate. A slight impatient quivering only in his fingers, something like the half-clutch of the impatient vulture's claw, might have indicated to a very close observer that his office was not one of love, but a ministry of hate. Cautiously he cleansed the wound, and poured in the healing styptic, bound the throat, and then prepared the draught for his exhausted patient.

"Precious elixir!" he murmured, "few in this island have ever tasted of thy healing virtues. I shall never more behold the flowers from which thy subtle essence was distilled. Little did I

dream, when first in Syria's land of wisdom I prepared it, that I should ever waste it on my bitterest foe. But he must live," he added, fiercely, between his teeth ; "live for a vengeance unheard of until now ; for a vengeance which alone can expiate a wrong like mine."

The sweet perfume of the balsam filled the chamber as it flowed into the cup. Highly as the Jew prized it, he poured it with no niggard hand ; so true is it that hate can sometimes be as liberal as love. With almost a mother's care, he raised the head of the wounded man, and poured the rich draught down his throat, then gently replaced him on his pillow, and, with his finger fixed upon his pulse, watched by him till he slept.

As soon as the deep breathing of Robert of Artois convinced the old man that the medicine had taken effect, he rose from his seat beside him, and walking to the foot of the couch, gazed upon him for a few moments in fearful silence.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "the God of Israel, though slow, is just ; the destroyer of my fair and innocent child, like a helpless infant, is prostrate at my mercy. Rachel," he added passionately, "why did not I sooner know thy destiny ?" For years so near thee, yet ignorant of the casket which contained my treasure. I would have ransomed all thy tears with pearls : as it is, they shall be repaid thee by his groans. He scorned thee, too, poor girl ! He shall have scorn for scorn, become his brother nobles' jest, be scourged from the halls of his fathers, like some vile impostor, and die despairing and accurst. If I could not save my offspring, I can at least avenge her. But stay," he added, "something the Nazarene spoke of thy heroic death. Thy bones must not bleach amidst the ruins of thy tyrant's hold ! No Christian foot shall e'er profane them. I will myself go forth while thy destroyer sleeps, and, as the patriarch of old sought for the body of his son, so will I seek Rachel, lost child, for thine."

The bereaved parent struck a gong suspended by the side of his cabinet : its low musical sound was echoed through the house, and answered by a being who seemed half-giant and half-dwarf, so disproportionate was the contrast between his height and the vast breadth of his shoulders, the length of his arms, and the shortness of his legs, the muscles of both of which indicated agility and strength. Although somewhat advanced in years, he was far less aged than his master, whom he looked upon with a love and veneration amounting to idolatry, not only as a high priest of his nation, but as one of the wisest and best of created beings. To him his will was law ; and he would as soon have thought of questioning the slightest expression of it, as of disputing the Law of Moses, or the authenticity of the Pentateuch. Unlike most persons of his peculiar formation, there was nothing repulsive in his features ; on the contrary, they were indicative not only of benevolence and

intellect, but were distinguished by manly beauty. From his earliest childhood he had lived in the family of Abram, had partaken with him of persecution and sorrow, as well as shared the brief moments of sunshine in the old man's chequered, wandering life.

"Ezra," said his master, "hast thou heard of the destruction of Filby hold, the castle of the bold, bad man, who now lies sleeping here?"

"I have, father of the faithful race of Israel," answered the dwarf. "Eli, who purchased many vessels and much goodly plate of the spoilers, told me a strange tale concerning it. It seems the castle was betrayed into the hands of his enemies by some wanton daughter of our race, the discarded paramour of his fierce lusts."

"Speak not thus harshly of her," interrupted his master; "for, oh! she was my child—flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood; my long-lost, only child! When," he added, bitterly, "shall Israel efface the stains of her captivity among the heathen?"

The dwarf was struck to the heart by the tone of anguish in the old man's voice; he, too, had known and loved the erring Rachel, had watched her little footsteps when a child, heard her repeat her infant prayers, and when her ripening beauties opened to womanhood, guarded her with a parent's love, with almost a jealous lover's care. Her loss, which occurred during the siege of Rouen, was scarcely more felt by her father than himself. Madly he rushed from street to street, calling frantically upon the name of Rachel, and proffering sums so fabulous for her recovery that all who heard him deemed him mad. The sight of the being who had caused so much misery to himself and master excited his fury, and with a spring he bounded towards the couch, and doubtless would have strangled him, had not the voice of Abram restrained him from his purpose.

"Hold, Ezra!" he cried; "would that be vengeance?"

"No!" answered the dwarf, turning his eyes from the sleeper, as if fearful to trust them further.

"Leave him to me," resumed the old man; "at present we must go forth, whilst night favours our design. My Rachel's bones shall not be left to be trampled on by Christian feet. Bring our cloaks, and let the boat be ready."

Carefully securing the house, the disguised Israelites made their way to the water side, from whence a boat, rowed by the strong arms of Ezra, took them to Acle, where horses were easily procured to Filby. Abram found, by inquiries from one of his people, whom the thirst of gain led to remain all night about the ruins, that his daughter's remains had been interred, by order of Ulrick, under an oak, at a bowshot from the spot where she had fallen. By the aid of his companions, it was quickly removed; and the dwarf, taking it in his arms, mounted with it on horseback, the living and the

dead both being covered by a cloak. Daylight had dawned when they reached the house.

The lordly prior of the Dominicans was seated at his morning repast, when a servitor announced the arrival of the esquire of his nephew, whose supposed loss he bore with wonderful equanimity, although the world had previously given him credit for entertaining a sincere affection for him. The order to admit him was immediately given, for he hoped to find him the bearer of certain letters which had passed between himself and his relative, the discovery of which would seriously compromise him with Herbert de Lozenga, his spiritual superior. Hastily draining the remainder of the spiced hippocras in the flagon before him, he wiped his full lips with his linen kerchief, and prepared to receive him. Brantone, as was usual when approaching churchmen of his rank, bent the knee as he entered the apartment, exclaiming as he did so—

“Your benediction, reverend father! your benediction!”

“*Pax Dei sit semper vobiscum!*” muttered the priest, at the same time swallowing the remaining morsel of the manchet bread. “Hast brought me any letters from my nephew?”

“Alas! reverend father, you must be aware that he is unable to write.”

“I should think so,” drily answered the prior, who imagined that the esquire was trying the depths of his feelings, and the soldier on his part supposing that the uncle had been informed of his nephew’s almost miraculous escape.

“It will be some time before you will hear from him again.”

“I should hope so,” muttered the priest, not altogether pleased with what he considered Brantone’s familiarity.

“Besides, even if he could find strength to write, it would be difficult to find a messenger in his present abode.”

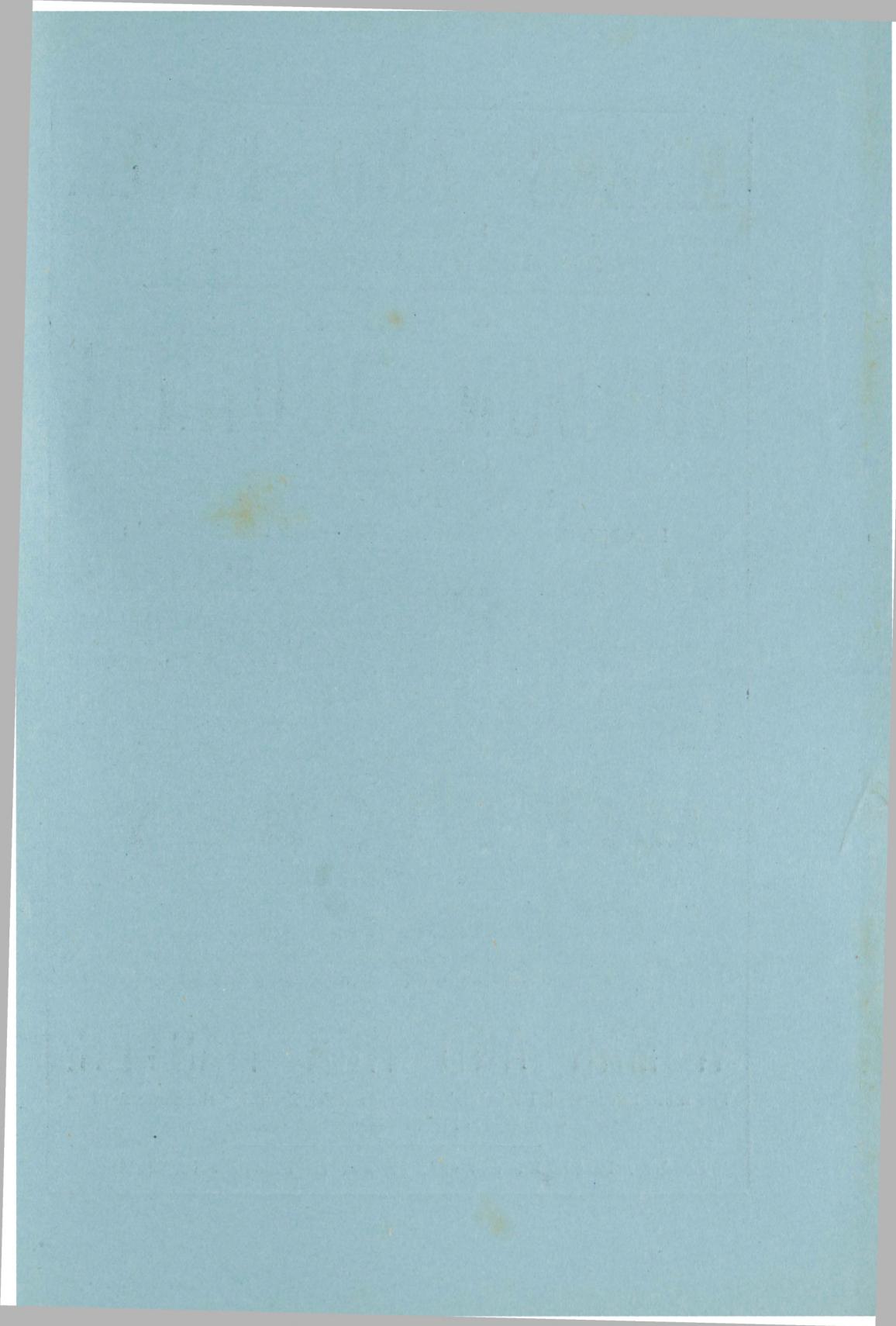
“I should think so, friend,” replied the ecclesiastic, crossing himself; “but answer me, Did your master, previous to his death, confide any papers to your charge? If so, quickly let me have them. Poor fellow,” he added, “his fate should be a warning to us all how we indulge in our sinful passions, or engage in dangerous enterprise.”

“How, reverend father?” exclaimed the soldier. “You are not yet aware that your nephew, Robert of Artois, still lives!”

“Lives!” echoed the uncle, with an expression of anything but agreeable surprise; “and what does he want with me? Doubtless gold—more gold. I had need hold the primacy, and my poor priory to boot, to supply half his extravagance; it hath nearly ruined me already.”

“My noble master will never need gold more; he is wounded unto death.”

“And where is he concealed?”



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